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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SITREP 16: LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF A RUSSIAN  
WITHDRAWAL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) Summary. As of mid-day, there were no definite sign of a Russian withdrawal from Georgia, but OSCE reported columns of Russian vehicles lining up in Gori and Kashuri on August 21. On the other hand, there also continue to be reports of erecting fortifications and the continued demolition of Georgian military assets. The Russian Embassy has told the Georgian MFA that travelers to and through Gori must register their plans in advance with the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi, adding that registry will "ensure unhindered movement". The Finnish Foreign Minister, on behalf of the OSCE Chairman in Office, told FM Tkeshelashvili that 20 OSCE monitors will be deployed in Gori next week. Human Rights Watch warns of unexploded cluster bomb elements on the ground in Georgian villages between Tskhinvali and Gori. Some, but not all, Georgian soldiers and civilians held prisoner were released by the Russians and the South Ossetians. End Summary.

RUSSIANS OUT? NOT YET.  
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¶2. (C) As of mid-day August 22, there is still no definite sign of a Russian withdrawal, although Russian armed forces officers have previously stated that movement would become apparent on August 22. OSCE reports that west of Kashuri and in Gori columns of military vehicles are lining up. OSCE termed these "indicators" of a possible withdrawal. There is no change at the military checkpoint at Igoeti, the closest Russian position to Tbilisi. UNOMIG told us it is looking into the explosions reported at the Senaki military base, reported reftel. Explosions were also reported from the military base in Gori.

¶3. (C) Russian troops at the port of Poti are reported to have been digging trenches, reinforcing their positions and destroying military infrastructure during the day of August 21. An embassy officer in Poti reported that there are now three Russian checkpoints in the Poti area, all with a certain level of permanency. The first is in the northern part of the city with 35 soldiers camped out; the second controls the Leoni Bridge which leads to the road to Senaki; and the third is on the road to Senaki. Through these three checkpoints, the Russians can control anything coming out of the port. The rail line also runs through their positions.

¶4. (C) Russian military sources say a pullout, or "pull-back", could take up to ten days. Georgian DFM Vashadze told us that Russian DFM Karasin called early August 21 to complain that Georgian forces were firing on Russian soldiers in Gori and that this could delay the withdrawal. Vashadze said that he told Karasin that there wasn't a single Georgian soldier "between the Roki Tunnel and Gori" and demanded specific information from the Russians about the locating of the incident. None was forthcoming.

RUSSIA REQUIRES REGISTRY OF TRAVEL TO GORI

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15. (U) The Georgian MFA announced that the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi has delivered a diplomatic note that says any persons wishing to travel through Gori must give the Embassy notice of their travel plans so instructions can be given to the Russian peacekeeping command, "which will further ensure unhindered movement." The MFA reacted by labeling this requirement a violation of the cease-fire agreement and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as well as an insult to Georgia's sovereignty. At mid-day August 21, a Swedish diplomat was being prevented from entering Gori and told that he will be allowed to proceed after "special permission" is received. The Russian checkpoints have routinely been turning back USG personnel attempting to enter Gori.

REQUIEM FOR TSKHINVALI  
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16. (U) Russian orchestral conductor Valery Gergiev led a concert in Tskhinvali on August 21, a requiem for those killed in the fighting there. The GOR flew foreign journalists to Vladikavkaz and then bused them south to Tskhinvali to attend. The concert was broadcast live on Russian state-owned TV channels.

SOME GEORGIAN PRISONERS RELEASED  
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17. (U) The press reported that the Russians released ten of the 22 Georgian soldiers seized at Poti on August 19.

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Sixty-three Georgian civilians being held in Tskhinvali were swapped for eight South Ossetian prisoners in Gori on August 21. Most of them were elderly men and women. Georgian officials say 101 Georgian civilians remain in South Ossetian custody.

RUSSIAN CLUSTER BOMB DANGER  
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18. (U) Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned on August 21 that hundreds of unexploded submunitions from cluster bombs are lying on the ground in and around the villages of Shindisi and Pkhvenisi (in Georgian territory just south of Tskhinvali), posing a risk to life. "Many people have died because of Russia's use of cluster munitions in Georgia, even as Moscow denies it had used this barbaric weapon," said Marc Garlasco, senior military analyst for HRW.

VISITORS  
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19. (U) U.S. General Craddock, in Tbilisi August 21, publicly stressed the humanitarian aspects of the USG's military mission in Georgia and was seen on television visiting IDP's.

USAID's Henrietta Fore announced to the press \$10.7 million worth of U.S. humanitarian assistance had already been delivered. Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, representing the OSCE Chairman in Office, visited Gori and promised more humanitarian aid for the city. After an August 21 meeting with FM Tkeshelashvili, he said that 20 OSCE observers will start working in Gori the week of August 25. NATO special representative Robert Simmons expressed sympathy for IDP's and vowed NATO will not do business as usual with Russia until it withdraws from Georgia. He reportedly said NATO will assist Georgia to rebuild its air defense and other defensive infrastructure. President Basescu of Romania said Romania will support MAP for Georgia in December.

110. (U) Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Berman and Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee Miller are visiting Tbilisi August 22. They will meet with Speaker of Parliament Bakradze and President

Saakashvili before returning to Paris. Rep. Chris Smith is meeting with the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church and human rights organizations in Tbilisi August 22; he is expected to return to the U.S. on August 23. Senator Lugar arrives in Tbilisi the evening of August 23.

#### SANAKOYEV HELPS RUSSIANS HOME

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¶11. (U) The Georgia-supported alternative de facto government of South Ossetia, led by Dmitri Sanakoyev, assisted 300 Russian citizens to return to Russia via the border crossing north of Kazbegi. The Russians had been denied assistance by the Russian Embassy because they were in Georgia illegally.

#### PROTESTS

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¶12. (U) Peaceful protests of the Russian occupation were held at the Igoeti checkpoint, in Kutaisi and in Poti. Among the groups protesting were medical doctors, teachers, and representatives of Georgia's ethnic Armenian community.

TEFFT